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The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics

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THE THEMATIC of "Ground," brought to the forefront with greater and greater urgency by the works of Martin Heidegger, is one that is not easily exhausted. His precise verdict of the "death of philosophy" owing to the forgetfulness of being (*Vergessenheit des Seins*) and the plea for truth as "the return to being" seem to take up once again the dialogue with classical realism that modern thought had sharply interrupted. Nonetheless, if the venerable *ens* of Parmenides is to be called back to the heart of the philosophical Logos, and be its ground, it can only come about from within that decisive experience of the problem of truth which modern thought has undergone: any response must truly give meaning and consistency to the dialogue and rediscover its universal key. This key is undoubtedly *ens* (being) and there can be no other. On this point, however distant their interpretations of its meaning, both St. Thomas and Hegel (and with him Heidegger) agree with Parmenides, who discovered it for the first time. Their elucidations, however, seem extremely meager and far from wholly satisfying.

The Problem of Being in Modern Philosophy

The speculative tradition of the West has made of *ens* a "concept," in fact the concept of concepts, at the farthest limit of abstraction, and one to which, because of its absolute purity of content, the most crystal clear evidence belongs. But what is that content? In the scholastic conception it is the "whatness" of all things; in the Hegelian conception it indicates the primitive and most indeterminate act of consciousness, thus empty (just as "whatness") and equivalent to nothing. And, hence, everything must vanish into nothingness: from an "act without content" nothing more can be expected. Is it possible to escape the impasse? Now that both formalistic scholasticism and modern thought have completely

exhausted their cycle, the problem assumes a new urgency if we are to break once and for all the cycle of "objective systems" and finally pose the truly radical questions of foundational thought.

This thought, first of all, is not, nor can it be, the thinking of *something*, the experiencing of *this* or *that* thing, or the constructing of this or that science, nor even the applying of oneself to the elaboration of a philosophical system. It is rather the original act that sustains and renders possible every particular act and every specialized form of thought. The foundational thought of being is not at all, then, the "most generic" thought: such a generic thought refers to content and to refer it back to *ens* as to the most generic thought, i.e., empty of all content, is no longer to think in any way at all. This is not genuine thought at all: on this point both formalistic scholasticism and Hegel have been guilty of the same oversight, even if they proceed according to opposing methods.

Foundational thinking indicates that "awareness of presence" of the real to consciousness which is absolutely first and underivable, by means of which consciousness is, and is called, an act. And thus it is the foundation, the *prius constitutivum* of every further act of consciousness. Not by chance, then, was *ens* the first term to be called a "transcendental," and, at the same time, one can understand how the turning upside-down of this term by Kant and Idealism has led modern thought to the final form of its resolution.

Kant demonstrates that he retains some residual awareness of the scholastic "transcendental," though only with imprecision. He recalls it first of all to show the superiority of his own "transcendental" but also to point out in the older doctrine an exigency, valid in itself, which he was going to satisfy better. The haste with which Kant treats the problem shows his somewhat less than complete information in this regard, though it remains a significant indication of the attitude of his epoch and the extent of his own speculative interests. He writes, in fact:

> In the transcendental philosophy of the ancients there is included yet another chapter containing pure concepts of the understanding which, though not enumerated among the categories, must, on their view, be ranked as a priori concepts of objects. This, however, would amount to an increase in the number of the categories, and is therefore not feasible. They are propounded in the propositions so famous among the Schoolmen: *quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum.*[1]

[1] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, trans. N. K. Smith, B 113.

The text is not without its inexactnesses. The first and fundamental one is the interpretation of the scolastic concept of "transcendental" as a pure concept (a priori) in the sense that Kant himself has given to this term. He therefore finds it quite incongruous and in the rest of the paragraph gives it simply the interpretation of "logical requirements and criteria," thus making it the antithesis of what actually was the scholastic doctrine of the transcendentals, which constituted (or ought to have constituted) the most pure speculative moment of all metaphysics.

The inadequacy of the Kantian conception of the classical "transcendental" reveals itself, then, in the rather summary statement of the transcendentals in the brief formula; *quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum* . . . , without adverting even in passing to the function that *ens* has in the foundation of transcendentality. *Ens* is posited as the simple material subject of the transcendentals and not as the dynamic nucleus of their genesis and their inseparable ground. Had Kant said, "Ens inquantum ens est unum, verum, bonum," this would have been enough to have shown he had at least some awareness of the problem, namely, the dynamic interior of *ens*, whereas his own formula, as it is presented, is a purely static one. The Kantian blind spot emerges, then, in the strange explanation that he next gives of the founding of these three transcendentals, making use of the categories of quantity or unity, plurality and totality (*Einheit, Vielheit, und Allheit*), which correspond to the concepts of unity, truth and perfection or completeness (*Vollständigkeit*). Nonetheless, Kant had the merit of raising the problem that touches on the very possibility of metaphysics itself—a problem which deserves to be taken up again and considered in depth.

What is surprising in the position of Kant is the absence of any interest in being as the fundament. A child of rationalism and faithful in this to the Aristotelian concept of knowing as awareness of the universal and necessary, he never concerns himself with the knowledge of being as such and the manner in which it is present to consciousness. Thus knowledge is expressed only in necessary judgments by means of the a priori categories: and the aspect of reality's "making itself present" and, therefore, of what stands as the ground of the apprehension of being, how it is expressed, and what it signifies, remains, as a result, completely hidden and passed over in silence, or attributed indiscriminately to sensible experience. In the text just cited, both in the formula and again in the discussion, Kant concerns himself only with the three derived transcendentals (*unum, verum, bonum*) and says nothing of the original

transcendental that is *ens*, from which they are derived and upon which they are grounded. No wonder that he tries, then, to refer them to the logical sphere of the quantity of judgments and finds them, as a result, a useless duplication of his own categories!

Only much further on, when he is discussing the impossibility of the ontological argument for the existence of God, does Kant introduce, in passing, the problem of being, but his position is of extreme speculative interest, as Heidegger has recently pointed out.[2] Kant writes: "*Being* is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves."[3] The text seems so self-explanatory that any comment would appear superfluous; but this is not the case. Rather, the text invites us, helps us to shed light on a world of extremely complex intentional relationships that are decisive for the world of thought. It shows on the one hand the point of arrival of the conception of knowledge as "exactness" (*Richtigkeit*) and thus of the scientific ideal as "necessity" (*Notwendigkeit*); on the other hand, it constitutes the point of departure for the new conception of the affirmation of being as referred to the spontaneity of consciousness. The thesis of Kant, as Heidegger has explained, contains two positions: the first is negative, that which denies to being the character of a real predicate; from this derives the subsequent position, or thesis, that characterizes being purely as a "positing" (*Position*).

The first negative proposition is introduced with an "obviously" (*offenbar*), that is, that being is not a real predicate, which is to say that it does not contain in itself any "content" or determination that in any way belongs to the subject. It is the same as saying that "being" is empty, or even, and perhaps better (because Kant is not yet Hegel), that being is signifying but not significant. The immediate continuation of the text makes precise, in fact, the judgment, which, from the formal point of view, is indisputable. The proposition, "God is omnipotent," contains two concepts that have their objects: "God" and "omnipotent." The word "is" does not express a predicate by itself, but is only what puts the predicate in relationship to the subject (*beziehungsweise aufs Subjekt*). And Kant has stacked the cards for his pure formal analysis. If, he continues, I reunite the subject (God) with all its predicates (to

[2] M. Heidegger, *Kants These über das Sein* (Frankfurt a. M., 1963).
[3] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 598; B 626.

which omnipotence also belongs), and I say, "God is," or "There is a God," then I do not add any new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and precisely as the object in relation to my concept.

Kant is, thus, wholly taken up with the foundation of objectivity as content and leaves in darkness the ground itself that is being as the "making itself present" of reality as act and actuality. What results in this fashion, that is, as concerns the content, is that possible and real do not at all differ. Both (object and content), we read, must have exactly the same content. Therefore, to the concept that expresses simply the possibility nothing further can be added by the fact that I think its object as given absolutely (by the expression, "It is."). Thus the real contains nothing more than the merely possible. Consequently, the essential problem is only and always that of the "content" and of "the manner of conceiving" the content. Kant, whose starting point was the problem of the foundation of the validity of science, looks ahead only to the growing success of the new Galilean physics, because he leaves in darkness and obscurity the first relationship of consciousness to being that conditions every other relationship and illuminates their meaning.

The celebrated example of the "one hundred thalers" clarifies once and for all the constitutive formalism of Kant's position, faithful in this respect to decadent scholasticism and rationalism. But, at the same time, it reveals the intrinsic uncomfortableness that affects every philosophy concentrating purely on content, be it realistic or idealistic. Thus one hundred real thalers contain absolutely nothing more than one hundred possible thalers. In fact, because the latter signify the concept, while the former indicate the object and its being posited in itself, it follows that in the case in which the object would contain more than the concept, its concept would not express the whole object and would, therefore, not even be an adequate concept of the object. It might almost be said that Kant is an Avicennian. For Avicenna—as we shall see—I can think the essence of a thing without including its existence, since only in God does essence necessarily require existence, while in creatures existence is an extrinsic predicate. Existence is an extrinsic predicate as well for Kant, or even more exactly, it consists in an extrinsic reference. He recognizes, indeed, that with respect to the state of his actual inheritance of the one hundred real thalers there is something more than a mere concept (that is, mere possibility), but the difference is presented as purely extrinsic. As a matter

of fact, observes Kant, the object is not simply contained in an analytic manner in my concept, but is added to my concept in a synthetic manner (which is a determination of my state), that is, by means of the reference to the sensible affection thanks to which the affirmation of existence is made. It is clear, therefore, that Kant knows no other concept of being (existence) than that scholastic-rationalistic concept expressed by the couplet *possible-real*, and knows the act of existence only as a fact, by which the one hundred thalers are not in the least increased, because it stands outside the concept.[4]

At this point, the discussion of Kant's position becomes almost a judgment on the entire speculative tradition of the West in the line that has led to the "loss of the ground" by sweeping man away in the becoming of the world and of the history that contains him and holds him fast. Kant, in fact, in the manner of any Scotist or Suarezian, continues undaunted: If I, therefore, think a thing, by means of whatever and however many predicates one wishes (and even with a complete determination), then when I add further, "This thing is," in reality I add absolutely nothing to the thing. Otherwise it would not be the same thing that I have thought in my concept, but there would exist something more and I would not be able to say that the object of my concept really exists.

What Kant intends, therefore, is quite clear, but not under all its aspects, and it is not difficult to point this out. As a matter of fact, the statement that the content of one hundred possible thalers and one hundred real ones is the same resolves nothing about the problem of the grounding of the real, that is about the infinite and incommensurable difference that there is between the possible and the real. On this level one hundred real thalers are quite wholly other than one hundred possible thalers; nay rather, one thaler, or even one one-hundredth of a thaler, is infinitely more than a million, or one hundred million, or any number of possible

[4] As Heidegger has pointed out, during Kant's pre-critical period he treats of *Dasein* and of *Sein überhaupt* in their simple affirmative and negative meaning, in a form that tallies in some manner with the exposition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. The negative proposition states: "Existence (*Dasein*) is not some predicate or determination of anything whatever." The positive affirmation is: "The concept of a positing (*Setzung*) is wholly simple and identical with being in general." Cf. *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (1763); Cassirer II, 76 ff. The concept of a "positing" in critical thought is no longer that of "being in general" but obeys the new principle of "synthetic a priori judgments" and includes, therefore, the reference to experience.

thalers, which cannot pay the slightest debt, nor buy the smallest crumb of bread to satisfy one's hunger. Kant too was as aware as anyone else of this difference, but it did not enter into the sphere of his speculative discourse on the truth. He even seems at a certain moment to remove himself as far as possible from it: obdurate in the "position of the supremacy of content," and objectivizing being, so to speak, so that predication "adds" nothing to the content of the concept, he concludes triumphantly that the predication of reality adds nothing and takes nothing away but "posits" only what is found (in the concept). And if I think something lacking in some perfection, the missing perfection will not be added to it by the fact that I say, "Just such a defective thing exists."

The Crisis of Being: Kant to Hegel

The procedure of Kant (when he contests the validity of the demonstration that pretends to pass from the possible to the real in the case of God as well) is valid only in the formal sphere (of content) to exclude the ontological argument of rationalist metaphysics, as St. Thomas had already done against the Platonizing rationalism of St. Anselm. But on the plane of the real the position of Kant remains wholly precarious, because he has left the "quality" of existence completely outside when he reduced it to an extrinsic determination, that is, one that is purely phenomenological or totally dependent on the reference to sensible affection. What is lacking in Kant, for this reason, is any attempt at a further grounding, or reduction, of existence itself to a real content, namely, to an act or actuality more profound and constitutive of the existing thing. Along the path that Kant follows he could not have done more than maintain a balance between realism and idealism.[5] In conclusion: existence is not a real predicate, either in its logical usage as "copula," since it is only the relationship of S and P, or in its real usage of positing (in space and time), since such being implies no new predicate or content but only the reference to experience by the transcendental apperception (*Ich denke überhaupt*).

Existence, therefore, which for the pre-critical Kant and the rationalism from which he inherited it was only a fact and an empirical datum of experience, is determined in his critical philosophy

[5] Cf. in this respect the refutation of idealism on the basis of internal experience of "my existence in time," insofar as it is connected to something ouside of me, which Kant has added in the *Preface* to the second edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 40 ff.

by the starting point of the transcendental apperception as referred to sensible affection. This takes place in the objective proposition of the judgment, taken as the fundamental principle.[6] What is new and revolutionary in the critical conception is the pointing out that, although the "positing" of existence is always referred back to the fact or the givenness of experience by sensible affection, the principle of reference is carried back to the "I" as objectifying principle in two moments or acts (if they can be called thus): the act of making present (the *Ich denke überhaupt*), and the subsequent objectifying function (by the application of the categories). The "new way" of the *Critique* thus confers on "existence as a positing" —an evident derivation, by the way, from the scholastic notion of existence as *positio rei extra causas*—a totally new dimension as linked with the principle of synthesis or of reference to experience. Such a reference stands, in fact, at the foundation of the new transcendental determination of existence that is found in the "Postulates of Experience" or of empirical thought in general, which refer to the categories of modality. The first postulate, according to Heidegger, asserts: (a) The possibility (*Möglichsein*) of an object consists in the being-posited of something so that it is in "agreement with" what is given in the pure forms of intuition, namely space and time, and thus allows itself to be determined according to the pure forms of thought, that is, according, to the categories. (b) The reality (*Wirklichsein*) of an object is the being-posited of a possible in such a way that what is posited is "bound up with" sense perception. (c) The necessity (*Notwendigsein*) of an object is the being-posited of what is "connected with" the real in accordance with the universal laws of experience.[7] "In agreement with . . . , bound up with . . . , connected with . . ."—these are the three moments of the fundamental synthetic relationship between the *Ich denke* and experience that constitutes the two poles of the relationship. But Kant was never able to clarify on what foundation such a connection between thought and experience can be established. Thus the probelm of being is hardly touched upon, or is pointed to only in passing. But his problematic has fully force touched on or indicated the mutual connection of the intellect and experience, or more exactly empirical intuition, in the concept of being. So long as there was not recognized a moment anterior to the specification of the real which constitutes the foundation and the presence of

[6] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Kants These über das Sein*, p. 22.
[7] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 219, B 266 ff.

the real in act and of thought in act, the philosophical problem of truth had no *raison d'être* nor could it have a solution.

Let it be noted, at once, in all this resolution of being into appearing, internal or external as the case may be, that this conception of being in the last analysis only intensifies the two properties of the scholastic-rationalistic conception: that of not being a predicate and of being simply a positing. But what is it that "posits"? For scholasticism and for extrinsecist rationalism, which has not yet declared itself atheistic, the one who does the positing in the metaphysical sphere is the first cause or God, and then the secondary causes, while in the cognitive sphere it is simply the attention to sensible experience. How these two spheres can meet does not seem to have been a problem that much disturbed or worried rationalism. Nor, moreover, was the Kant of the critical period profoundly concerned that he had had recourse to "two" positers, understanding and experience, or sensible affection, by means of that converging function that is the a priori synthesis.[8] But the fracture (*Spaltung*) or separation (*Trennung*) between the two spheres or two positers still remains and is more profound than before because of the acknowledged inaccessibility of the noumenon that rationalism had, on the contrary, pretended to penetrate.

In a last attempt at the foundation of being, which is found in an appendix to our discusssion and which carries the title "The Amphibologies of the Concepts of Reflection," Kant achieves a new step in the interpretation of being. It consists in a restriction in the application of the intellect to experience inasmuch as the positing act is unified within that synthetic function that now comes to be called "reflection," by means of which the positing in its entirety is posited, an entirety which is at once the presence of the real and its determination or limitation. Kant writes, in fact:

> The act by which I confront the comparison of representations with the cognitive faculty to which it belongs, and by means of which I distinguish whether it is as belonging to the pure understanding or to sensible intuition that they are to be compared with each other, I call the transcendental reflection.[9]

[8] Even Heidegger admits that Kant ". . . insofar as he determines being as simply a positing, understands being as a situation circumscribed, namely, by the starting point of *positing* as the action of human subjectivity, that is, of the human understanding referred to a sensible datum" (*Kants These über das Sein*, p. 28 ff.).

[9] *KRV*, A 261, B 317.

It is clear now that all of being, possible being as well as real, has slipped into transcendental subjectivity insofar as *possible being* is only what is thinkable, but merely to the extent of the a priori synthesis; that is, it too is a "positing" in relation to the formal conditions of experience. In this regressive or reductive explanation of knowing, possibility is no longer located in the "compatibility" of the notes of a concept but is the positing that emerges in the transcendental operation of that relation to the formal conditions of experience which Kant calls the *form*, while real being, or reality, is determined, on the other hand, by relation to the material conditions of experience, and hence grounds as well the new meaning of the Kantian concept of *materia*. Therefore, Heidegger can conclude, for Kant being as "positing" presents itself as a "reflection on reflection," as a thought of thought, that is referred to perception and is "located in the plexus of human subjectivity as in the place of its essential origin."[10] But, in spite of all this, the fracture remains and could not be removed or overcome along this line.

The gap was bridged, as is known, by transcendental idealism through the twofold and converging unification of the plexus of matter and form in the transcendental act of the Kantian "I" as pure activity (i.e. will) and the elimination of the duality of nature and mind in the unity of Spinozan substance achieved precisely within the interior of the "I." This, which can be called the synthesis of Kant and Spinoza, expresses only the systematic and decisive moment of the forward leap achieved by transcendental idealism in the determination of being and of the relationship being-thought that is constitutive of philosophy. A more accurate study, that exceeds the scope of the present comparison, could show that the idealistic unification had intended to work and move within the framework of the three Kantian *Critiques* when it interpreted them precisely as three moments of a progressive advance of consciousness towards that unity of act, which, already foreshadowed in the transcendental reflection of the first *Critique*, was expressly affirmed in the categorical imperative and was presented as accomplished or in the process of accomplishment in the *Critique of Judgment*. At any rate, even in this development of the three *Critiques* the basis of the Kantian position on being remained intact, that is, in its twofold meaning of "copula" and "position," of logical relationship between S and P in the proposition, and of synthetic

[10] *Kants These über das Sein*, p. 31.

relationship of transcendental subjectivity in respect to sensible affection.

It has been seen how the problem of being is posed and remains in Kant as tangential (*ἐν παρέργῳ*) and that it was reduced to the function of a relationship of consciousness, the relationship of matter and form which is then the relationship of being and thought—or rather which "ought to have been" this relationship, but in Kant never succeeded in becoming this completely, because of the distinction of phenomenon and noumenon that is fundamental in the doctrine of a priori synthesis. The relationship of being and thought in Kant remains for this reason radically ambiguous: on the one hand, there is the intrinsic and mutual connection of thought and being, in the sense that being is only for thought in virtue of the *Ich denke* that manifests it and places it on its own part as appearance; but, on the other hand, experience conditions thought and gives to the "positing" (of being) a foundation and a terminus (the thing—*Ding an sich*). Being as "positing" in Kant is, therefore, determined by the empirical use of the intellect; it is, therefore, a rising up and making itself present for consciousness that is actuated in "time," and in the interpretation of Heidegger is spoken of and expressed exactly by the couplet: being and time (*Sein und Zeit*).[11]

And not by chance has Kant, as was hinted above, founded his own refutation of psychological idealism on the necessary reference of consciousness to time, beyond which Heidegger himself was able to rise because he was assisted by the development of other sources (Dilthey, Husserl, and Nietszche). Kant expounds the reference to sensible receptivity, thanks to which being is constituted as a positing, in the following way: I am conscious of my own existence in time by means of an internal experience. But, Kant hastens to make precise in order to avoid the solipsism of knowing-representing, this means having consciousness of my own existing, which, let us note carefully, is determinable only by reference to something outside myself that is connected to my existence. Thus this consciousness of my existence in time is identically connected with the consciousness of something outside of myself, and this connects inseparably the external with my internal sense, and therefore constitutes experience and not fiction, sense and not the power of my imagination. Such experience of internal intuition, Kant continues, is not an *intellectual intuition* but a sensory in-

[11] *Kants These über das Sein*, p. 36.

tuition only, which is connected with the condition of time. Such internal experience connected with time, depends, therefore, on something permanent within me and consequently can only be rooted in something apart from myself with which I must consider myself in relation.[12] This whole discourse, apparently so complicated, is in reality quite simple: it is meant to affirm the intrinsic solidarity of the internal sense with the external sense thanks to the mediation of time, or rather, of the certainty that I have of existing in a determined manner in time and with this of the reference of the *Ich denke* to sensible affection from which begins and in which terminates the movement of being's making itself present as a "positing." For the rationalist definition of being as *existentia: actus quo res sistitur, ponitur extra causas* (or *extra statum possibilitatis*) Kant substitutes the formula: *actus vel determinatio subjecti quo res sistitur, ponitur extra subjectum.*

But the problem of being has not made much progress: for Kant, just as for realism against the psychological idealism or representationalism of Berkeley, the determination of being is given as "presentation" but—differently from realism—the one who makes present is for Kant at root the subject himself according to the functions in descending order of the *Ich denke*: the categories, internal experience (the "I" in time), and the external world (space) by means of which the a priori synthesis is to be actuated. The meaning of being as a "positing" in the *active sense* is, therefore, quite on the side of the subject, although not altogether so in view of the reference to sensible receptivity. But such a reference to sensible affection is actuated by means of the "enduring" of time to which is made to correspond a permanence in the external world. But since for Kant we do not have an intellectual intuition, we do not have any direct intellectual consciousness, either of the empirical ego or of the sensible world and consequently being is exhausted as it were, in the act of positing or "presentation." Being as presentation is thus an act of "presentification" that can be called a projecting of the ego towards the world and being is neither the "I" nor the world strictly. Being does not have content, is not a real predicate, but it is, in the end, given by the same self-actuation of the transcendental subjectivity in view of the constitution of an object according to the threefold modality of possibility, reality and necessity; and herein is expressed the articulation but also the internal division of being itself.

[12] *KRV*, B 40.

Thus it can be said, finally, that being as a "positing" in Kantianism is actuated by a type of "mutual rebounding" of the "I think" to external experience and of external experience to the "I think," without either of the two poles discovering a basis for such a return of the one on the other. This is true not only because of the opposition which sets them apart, but, above all, because the act of presentification is completely filled with ambiguity: on the one hand, it ought to belong to the sphere of empirical experience because it is endowed with an intuition that is precisely the reception of presence and is presence in act, while, on the other hand, it is proper to the *Ich denke*, which must accompany every representation and without which no presence nor the awareness of presence in act, which is being as a "positing," can be possible.

From the Modern to the Thomistic Notion of Being

However one regards or judges the Kantian position on being, it remains airtight, and at the same time, replete with suggestions, doubts and questions because it transcends the restricted field of its problematic and spreads into the unlimited problem of the foundation of thought, toward which every philosophy reaches. Not by chance, therefore, has this problem of being remained in obscurity on the side of the Kantian tradition, if exception be made for Hegel and Heidegger. And the reason for this, or at least the most important reason, seems to be that in the Western tradition—beginning with Plato and Aristotle—to know is primarily and especially "to objectify," that is to insure for the subject a content that is the "material" to be treated, manipulated, systematized . . . for the purposes of science and life. Thus "content" has prevailed over *act* in such a way that act has been conceived and outlined a priori in function of content, or in order to guarantee the grasp of content by consciousness.[13] This is already clearly seen in Leibniz and Hume, for example, although for different reasons, and is verified primarily in the works of Kant, which continue and transform in a unitary fashion those two opposed conceptions.

[13] This is what Heidegger denounces: "Alle Philosophie vor Descartes erschöpft sich im blossen Vorstellen des Objectiven. Auch Seele und Geist werden wie Objekte, obzwar nicht *als* Objekte vorgestellt" ("Hegel und die Griechen," in *Die Gegenwart der Griechen*: Festschrift für H. G. Gadamer zum 60. Geburtstage, Tübingen, 1960, p. 48). The observation is certainly not valid in the case of St. Thomas who defends an immediate perception, although conditioned, of the existence of the soul and its spirituality (cf. C. Fabro, *Percezionee pensiero*, 2d ed. Brescia, 1962, pp. 351 ff.).

To define with Kant, and like Kant, that being is a "positing" is, despite all efforts to the contrary, to enclose oneself in a labyrinth without a way out. Such a "positing" *in the sense of a positing act* cannot be made by the understanding with the *Ich denke* because the latter is empty insofar as it is the pure activity of the application of the categories, but it is just as impossible, rather, still more impossible, that such a "positing act" be attributed to sensible intuition, which is in itself the "dust of sensations," and consequently is only a passive terminus of that positing. This refers not simply to the well known difficulty about the foundation of the applicability of the categories to the material of sense intuition. It is a question of a much more serious difficulty, one that precedes the entire movement of the complicated mechanism of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: that, namely, of determining consciousness in what is the first moment and primary movement, that is, the first step or beginning as Hegel will say, and so in the final analysis, of clarifying what is the first quality of being, or rather, of the orientation of consciousness in respect to being. In the treatment of Kant one has the impression that he sought to avoid the difficulty when he gave an answer that avoided the problem at its essential moment.

It is St. Thomas, in our opinion, who made the authentic "radical beginning," but his path requires some more precise markings that the development of modern thought has made indispensable, if we are to be sure not to miss the signs. Fundamental to the modern thematic and problematic is the critical requirement or radicality of the initial position. This demands:

1) That the beginning be without presuppositions (*Voraussetzungsloskeit*), that is, that the beginning of theoretical reflection be placed as the appropriation or total reflection of consciousness on itself by the act that puts it in act originally by the apprehension of the real as such. Therefore:

2) Such a beginning must be made within the original act itself that is the "archetypal and founding act" of every apprehension of the real and therefore of the constitutive relationship of consciousness to reality itself in the infinite openness of the intentionality in consciousness itself. And so:

3) The process of thought and the advance of consciousness in general must be projected as a passage from the implicit to the explicit, that is, as a self-actuation, becoming more and more articulate by degrees, of the initial constitutive relationship, thus founding step by step the explicit presence of the real in itself throughout

the whole universe, both with respect to the world and with respect to consciousness.

4) Thus in the beginning everything is "in some manner" already given, not simply insofar as nothing is given distinctly, for the Hegelian beginning is empty and the extrinsic Kantian beginning from which it proceeds is "outside of thought"; but, insofar as, though likewise not presenting "something determinate" in the intentional fire, it—that is the beginning—is presented as the "fundament" (*Grund*) of anything at all being present as real and determinate.

5) Thus, finally, the beginning is found by philosophical reflection in such a way that it is indeed recognized as a starting point, but in a way that constitutes at the same time a criterion of the foundation and so a constitutive "return" (*Rückkehr*) and an immanent *re*-cognition that consciousness makes of its transcendental structure and of the law that contains it. The error of the rationalist tradition of every age has been that of starting from the abstract to reach the concrete, that is, of seeing the unconditioned *prius* in pure principles, hovering at the apex of the mind, without content: it is the temptation of pure objective evidence. The error of the empiricist tradition has been and remains, conversely, that of starting from the supposed concrete that is self-founding and self-justifying in its immediacy of presence. In this way it is easy to see that in both positions, though in a contrary movement, the three moments of beginning, process and fulfillment end by coinciding and by being exhausted in that passive "pure looking" (*ein rein Zusehen*) praised by Hegel.[14]

The attempt of Kant to found the two legitimate demands and to avoid the perils of each was nullified and failed in its starting point, as we saw, by his having forgotten the problem of being, that is, by pushing it aside, instead of situating it in the center of the speculative act.

From this dilemma, threatening the philosophical Logos with shipwreck on either side, St. Thomas was able to escape and it is a grave defect of some Thomistic tradition that they have not been astute enough to see it or, at least, have paid too little attention to it in searching elsewhere, namely in positions still leaning toward rationalism or empiricism, or in compromises, for the truth of the ground. The key was pointed out by St. Thomas in the apprehension

[14] *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Einleitung (ed. Hoffmeister, Leipzig, 1937), p. 72.

of *ens* and it is highly significant that it was presented with absolute clearness right from his first writings. Let us call attention to it at once: *ens* is not simply *essentia* or *esse*; rather it is the self-givenness in act of their synthesis. This is capital, this is total, if we are to grasp the originality and timeliness of the Thomistic position, still so little comprehended or even examined.

According to custom, St. Thomas sought some illustrious predecessors on which to rest his own position and he found his opportunity in Avicenna: "Ens est illud quod primo cadit in cognitione humana, ut Avicenna dicit."[15] It is quite probable, however, that here, as almost always, the Angelic Doctor is making use of a "pretext" and intends to shelter under the prestige and authority of others what is instead his own original accomplishment.

The atmosphere of any problem in Avicenna is rich with suggestions and complex. After exhausting in five chapters the formal preliminaries of metaphysics, in the sixth chapter (*De assignatione rei et entis* [*essentis*, ed. Veneta 1495] *et De eorum primis divisionibus ad hoc ut exciteris ad intelligentiam eorum*) Avicenna sets forth what for him are the effective preliminaries of all understanding and knowing:

> Dicemus igitur quod ens et res et necesse talia sunt quae statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se, sicut credulitas quae habet prima principia ex quibus ipsa provenit per se et est alia ab eis sed propter ea.[16]

[15] *In Boeth. de Trinitate*, q. 1, a. 3, ob. 3; ed. Decker 69, 11-12. The reference to Avicenna is almost constant: Cf. *De Ente et essentia*, Prol.: "Ens et essentia sunt quae primo intellectu concipiuntur, ut dicit Avicenna in principio suae Metaphysicae" (Baur, 11, 4-6). "Primum cadens in apprehensione est ens, ut Avicenna dicit" (*In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 4, ob. 4.). "Illud quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quod omnes conceptiones resolvit est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio Metaphysicae suae" (*De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1; cf. q. 21, a. 1.). "Primo in intellectu cadit ens, ut Avicenna dicit" (*In I Meta.*, 1. 2, n. 46). Without reference to Avicenna but with literal dependence on the Avicennian text: "Primum quod cadit in imaginatione intellectus est ens, sine quo nihil potest apprehendi ab intellectu; sicut primum quod cadit in credulitate intellectus sunt dignitates et praecipue ista, contradictoria non esse simul vera" (*In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3; Mandonnet I, 200). "Primum quod in intellectu est ens" (*De Pot.* q. 9, a. 7 ad 15; cf. ad 6). Illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione est ens . . ." (*I-II*, q. 94, a. 2). "Primum quod cadit in intellectu est ens" (*I-II*, q. 55, a. 4 ad 1). "Cum ens sit primum quod in intellectu concipitur . . . (*Ibid*).

[16] *Metaphysica*, Lib. I, c. 5; ed. Venice, 1508, fol. 72 rb (in the Ven. ed. of 1495, restored Brussels, 1961, this c. 5 is placed as c. 1 of Lib. II).

The text is programatic and invites further analysis.

First of all, not one but three notions are in play: namely, *ens*, *res*, *necesse esse*, which reveal the ontologist and Platonizing background that is characteristic of Avicennian speculation, while St. Thomas insists on and stops with *ens*.[17] This is quite significant for our research, as will be seen. Then—and it is an observation on his background—Avicenna says nothing on "how" such notions present themselves to the mind: he insists on affirming their character of immediacy and self-evidence, that is, the absolutely first and immediate correspondence between the verbal sign and the "grasp of meaning" that is expressed in the adverb *statim*. The point of view that is operative in this *reductio* seems decidedly logico-formal, that is, it avoids an infinite regress in the passage from one concept, more particular and less known, to those more universal and *thus* better known:

> Si autem omnis imaginatio egeret alia precedenti imaginatione procederet hoc in infinitum vel circulariter. Quae autem promptiora sunt ad imaginandum per seipsa sunt ea quae communia sunt omnibus rebus sicut res et ens et unum etc. Et ideo nullo modo potest manifestari aliquid horum probatione quae non sit circularis vel per aliquid quod sit notius illis.

It is a question, therefore, of a *reductio ad absurdum* carried back to the level of notions prior to the first principles, and Avicenna makes a personal acknowledgment of not having done it before in the preceding works, until the problem of the absolute intentional priority of *ens* has been grasped: "Unde quisquis voluerit discutere de illis incidet in volucrum [?], sicut ille qui dixit quod certitudo entis est hoc quod est vel agens vel patiens; quamvis haec divisio sit entis, sed tamen ens notius est quam agens vel patiens."[18] Once

[17] St. Thomas names *res* also, once, perhaps out of fidelity to the Avicennian text; never, however, does he point out as among the first notions *necesse esse*, to which Avicenna dedicates the last part of the chapter and with which in the following c. 7 he begins the systematic treatment of his metaphysics (cf. *De Ente*, 1.c.). The first division of being into *possible et necesse esse* was already in Alfarabi (cf. "Die Hauptfragen von Abu Nasr Alfarabi," in *Alfarabi's Philosophische Abhandlungen*, tr. Dieterici, Leiden 1892, pp. 93 ff.) and in the last analysis it proceeds from the theology of the Motazeliti (Albert N. Nader, *Le système philosophique des Mutazila*, Beyrouth 1956, espec. pp. 136 ff.).

[18] Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, *loc. cit.* The text continues and shows clearly that A. deliberately stops at the logico-ontic consideration that he considers

again—and the observation concerns the very structure of the whole problem—*ens* and *res* divide the entire intentional field into the two spheres of the actual and the possible, of real and logical being: "Similiter est etiam hoc quod dicitur quod res est id quod potest aliquid vere enunciari." At this point, after a long digression, Avicenna introduces as principal the formal meaning of *esse* that commands the whole of his metaphysics and directly the conception *necesse esse*:

> Sed res et quidquid equipollet ei significat etiam aliquid aliud in omnibus linguis; unaquaeque enim res habet certitudinem qua est id quod est; sicut triangulus habet certitudinem qua est triangulus et albedo qua est albedo. Et hoc est quod forte appellamus esse proprium nec intendimus per illud nisi intentionem esse affirmativi, quia verbum ens significat etiam multas intentiones ex quibus est certitudo qua est unaquaeque res sicut esse proprium rei.

What results, therefore, is that the *esse* of *ens* does not stand of itself, is not the founding principle that subsists and makes to subsist; rather *esse* falls into the modes of being of the essence and in general of the predicaments that *ens* embraces in a confused manner. And at this point Avicenna introduces his famous theory of the triple state of essence that can possess a being that is real, logical or indifferent in respect to (called "absolute"):

> Quoniam cum dixeris quod certitudo talis rei est *in singularibus* vel *in anima* vel *absolute*, erit tunc haec intentio apprehensa ab intellectu . . . quoniam intellectus de essente semper comitabitur illam, quia illa scilicet res habet esse vel in singularibus vel in aestimatione vel in intellectu.

De essente here stands certainly for *de ente*,[19] and then the whole doctrine squares nicely: *esse* for Avicenna is not *esse-actus* or better still *esse-ut-actus*, but *esse-in-actu* and Avicenna thus has become, with his master Alfarabi, the one responsible for metaphysical formalism, that is, for the uprooting of man from direct contact or essential connection with being and of being from man, which

a recent step in his thought: "Omnes enim homines imaginant certitudinem entis sed ignorant an debeat esse agens vel patiens, quod et mihi quoque usque nunc non patuit nisi argumentatione tantum" (ed. cit., 72 va). In both Venice editions (1495, 1508) the expression *in volucrum* is found. In all probability this should read *in circulum*, in view of the context. This is confirmed by the German version done from the original: *Die Metaphysik Avicennas*, trans. M. Horten, Frankfurt a. M., 1960, p. 48.

[19] As one may read of course in the title of our chapter in the 1495 ed. (*essentis*) where the 1508 ed. has *entis*.

forms the constitutive principle of consciousness as capacity for presence. The result is the channeling back of such capacity for presence into the formal-logical evidence of the concept, and of the actuality of presence into the purely extrinsic dependence of *possibile esse* on *necesse esse*.

What attracts the speculative acumen of St. Thomas in this doctrine is not so much the division of *possibile esse* and *necesse esse*, which in his maturity he will on the contrary expressly reject, as the internal dialectic of the transcendentals as the foundation of the fundamental theoretical act: it is barely hinted in the text of Avicenna and the Angelic Doctor draws it especially from the final speculation of Greek Neo-Platonism. In this original doctrine, totally unknown to Kant who was the initiator of the new a priori transcendental, the theoretical act is effectively actuated from itself as implication and connection of subject and predicate according to what might be called the process of identity or better "extensive affirmation" and satisfies precisely the requirements of the "a priori synthesis" that the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, together with the philosophy that followed it, tried in vain to ground. The argument, quite complex in its historical problematic, interests us here only in its theoretical nucleus, which we have delineated above. We may, then, be quite concise.

In the principal text of the Thomistic doctrine[20] we can distinguish three moments: the appearing of *ens*, the all-comprehensive actuating of itself, and its intentional expansion both in the univocal predicamental sphere and in the properly analogous transcendental sphere. The procedure is extremely rigorous and perhaps constitutes the most dense and formal text in the whole history of Western thought.

a) First of all, the method proper to metaphysics is affirmed. It is neither analysis nor synthesis but *reductio*: "Sicut in demonstrabilibus oportet fieri reductionem in aliqua principia per se intellectui nota, ita investigando quid est unumquoque, alias utrobique in infinitum iretur, et sic periret omnis scientia et cognitio rerum." The term *reductio* appears to be proper to St. Thomas and does not indicate so much a merely logical process of clarification of explicative resolution (*resolvit*) as rather the "return to

[20] *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1. The nucleus of this doctrine is already *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3. The classic parallel text, even in the structure of the exposition, is, certainly, *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 (*Utrum veritas sit essentia rei.*). The text of *De Veritate* (q. 1, a. 1) is that established by the Leonine commission, kindly put at my disposal by its President, Rev. A. Dondaine, whom I wish graciously to thank.

the fundament" and therefore a process of intensive and comprehensive foundation that the rationalistic tradition in the West has completely forgotten. Let us examine the text once again:

> Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quod omnes conceptiones resolvit est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio suae Metaphysicae; unde oportet quod omnes alias conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens.

The term *additio* ought not to lead us astray and make us think of a synthesis in the Kantian sense, whether a priori or a posteriori, since the Kantian synthesis presupposes the *separation* and constitutive incommunicability of intellectual and sense knowledge, while the Thomistic meaning is founded on their intrinsic communication and connectedness, even in their mutual distinction. This observation is capital in order to grasp the thread guiding the Thomistic procedure, which has the same as the great Prologue and first chapter of Book I of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, with the difference that, while Hegel proceeds from the abstract sphere of *Verstand*, St. Thomas puts himself at once within the sphere of the intensive *ens-esse* that stands at the root of *Verstand-Vernunft*.

b) If we have recourse to an Hegelian term, this process of intension-comprehension which starts at the notion of *ens* and which St. Thomas expresses with *addere-additio* might be expressed as *Diremtion*. It does, in fact, express that process proper to metaphysics which contains at the same time the two opposed processes of analysis and synthesis as an interior dividing up and recomposing within the original comprehensive intentional unity which is precisely what *ens* is. In this way the "dispersive" affirmation of Aristotle that being is nor considered a genus,[21] because it is a *πολλαχῶς λεγόμενον*,[22] becomes for St. Thomas an intensive affirmation, or a predication of constitutive and interior connectedness:

> Sed enti non possunt addi aliqua quasi extranea natura per modum quo differentia additur generi vel accidens subiecto, quia quaelibet

[21] *Meta.*, III, 3, 998b 22.

[22] "Spoken of in many ways": *Meta.* IV, 2, 1003a, 33; cf. VII, 1, 1028a, 10. To Aristotle what is important to put in relief is that the multiple meanings of being are not "disparate" but cöordinate and converging towards a common principle (*'ἀλλὰ πᾶν πρὸς μίαν ἀρχήν*) which is substance, that is called *ὄν* without qualification, while the other categories are only its *passiones* or derivatives (*πάθη οὐσίας*).

> natura essentialiter est ens; unde probat Philosophus in III Metaph. quod ens non potest esse genus; sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere super ens in quantum exprimunt ipsius modum qui nomine ipsius entis non exprimitur.

Being thus embraces each and every thing and every aspect of anything whatsoever, because it is by insertion into *ens* that each thing belongs to reality. But the actuation of such an *additio*, or the intentional expansion of *ens*, can happen in two directions, the one predicamental (or Aristotelian), and the other transcendental (Platonic or Neo-Platonic). They could be made to correspond—in the context of the present elementary analysis of the problem—to the twofold projection of being, the one in the sphere of direct and immediate knowledge that brings us to the predicaments, and the other in the area of the total reflection proper to the life of the mind that yields us the transcendentals. St. Thomas speaks of "modes" of apprehending and predicating the *esse* of *ens*—and it is obvious that the mode of predicating corresponds to and follows the mode of apprehending it.

c) The first is the sphere of phenomenologico-ontic knowledge of the predicaments and is predicamental knowledge, that is of the mode of having proper and determinate being, which is essence or the proper mode of the structuring of *res*, as the Thomistic text recalls further on. From the formal point of view St. Thomas uses the terminology of *modi speciales* and *modi communes*:

> Quod dupliciter contingit: uno modo ut modus expressus sit aliquis specialis modus entis; sunt enim diversi gradus entitatis secundum quos accipiuntur diversi modi essendi, et iuxta hos modos accipiuntur diversarum rerum genera; substantia enim non addit super ens aliquam differentiam quae designet aliquam naturam superadditam enti, sed nomine substantiae exprimitur quidam *specialis modus essendi*, scilicet per se ens: et ita est in aliis generibus.

It is obvious that here it is a question of the "content" of *ens*, with respect to which one speaks of a principal and founding content that is substance (*humanitas*) and of a secondary, that is, a derived and founded, content which are the accidents (*albedo*, *sanitas*).

The origin of the predicamental notions reaches, therefore, right back to the area of sensible experience, as *terminus a quo*, and, first of all, to the perception of the reality of the external world where observation imposes the distinction between what is founding and permanent (substance) in relation to what is secondary and

founded (accident). For the categories remain explicitly in the area of "content," or rather, it is a question of the *Diremtion* not so much of *ens* as more exactly of *res*, which is being as intrinsically qualified and qualifiable. This is quite different from the Kantian resolution that is dependent on the a priori of an amorphous continuum, on space and time as pure receptivity, and thus still on the total coherence of content. Hence the Kantian position of a purely functional *Sein*, that is founded in the determination of *Position*, as has already been suggested. This "positing of the categories" in Thomism, as we shall soon explain, is intrinsically connected with being, on whose foundation is actuated the branching out of consciousness from the first moments of knowledge right up to the most complicated elaborations of technology and science, all of which draw from the inexhaustibility of being the reason for their own development and progress.

d) The second intentional sphere—which is in itself the first and constitutive one—is the analogical knowledge of the transcendentals whose origin and whose function in the life of the mind Kant has completely misunderstood. They, in fact, constitute the fundamental actuation of consciousness and the permanent foundation of its whole interior expansion into experience, science and practical as well as moral activity. Our text opens this window of light with a clearness and penetration that is one of the highest points in the Thomistic writings:

> Alio modo [hoc contingit] ita quod modus expressus sit modus generaliter consequens omne ens; et hic modus dupliciter accipi potest: uno modo secundum quod consequitur unumquodque ens in se; alio modo secundum quod consequitur unumquodque ens in ordine ad aliud.

That is to say, the transcendental sphere, like that of the predicamentals before it, is generated by a twofold position, either absolute or relative. But, while in the following out of predicaments there results an impoverishment and almost a fall, in the articulation of the transcendentals there is instead an ascent towards the summit of perfection, and in such a way that the projected purpose of modern philosophy is turned upside down yet at the same time strangely achieved—that purpose which modern philosophy pursued in vain and with a totally opposite outcome, that is, with the final negation of philosophy itself as the determination of the truth of being. It is to this lofty purpose of thought that the two steps indicated by our text aspire.

1. Si primo modo, hoc est dupliciter quia vel exprimitur in ente aliquid affirmative vel negative; non autem invenitur aliquid affirmative dictum absolute quod possit accipi in omni ente, nisi *essentia* eius, secundum quam esse dicitur, et sic imponitur hoc nomen *res*, quod in hoc differt ab ente, secundum Avicennam in principio Metaphysicae,[23] quod *ens* sumitur ab actu essendi, sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem vel essentiam entis. . . .

The text is capital and merits some brief remarks on its principle.

The first is that *res* with the other transcendentals, inasmuch as they follow upon *ens*, are in "some manner" already contained in *ens* and in the most intimate manner, as their foundation and root. The formal reason is that in *ens* is expressed the first absolute actuation of esse: *ens sumitur ab actu essendi.*

By this—and it is the second observation—is understood that the transcendentals do not diverge except by converging on *ens*, do not add anything except to expand *ens*; they make explicit what is implicit in *ens.*[24]

Furthermore, in the third place, in the determination of *res* as content of *ens*, there is announced the clear distinction (real) of act (*esse*) and content (*essentia*) or proper subject of the act of being. Here lies the nerve of Thomistic metaphysics in its antithesis to the *Vergessenheit des Seins* of scholastic and immanentistic philosophy. In fact, it is present in our text: "Cum [a Boethio] dicitur: *Diversum est esse et quod est* distinguitur actus essendi ab eo cui actus ille convenit; *nomen autem entis ab actu essendi sumitur*, non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi."[25]

[23] This is the key text that was indicated above: *Meta.* I, I, c.5; ed. 1508, f. 72 rb; cf. M. Horten, *Die Metaphysik Avicennas* (Minerva, Frankfurt a. M., 1960), p. 44.

[24] "Verum non est in plus quam ens; ens enim aliquo modo acceptum dicitur de non ente, secundum quod ens est apprehensum ab intellectu. . . . Unde etiam Avicenna dicit in principio Metaphysicae suae, quo non potest formulari enunciatio nisi de ente, quia oportet illud de quo propositio formatur esse apprehensum ab intellectu" (*De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1 ad 7).

[25] *De Ver.* q. 1, a. 1 ad 3^2; cf. also ad 1: "Cum dicitur verum est id quod est non accipitur ibi secundum quod significat actum essendi . . . "; and later: "Esse est actus entis . . ." (q. 20, a. 8 ad 12). This meaning of *esse* as *actus essendi*, which is given here in its most explicit form, stands, for this reason, apart and is what we indicate as *esse ut actus* to distinguish it from *esse in actu*, which belongs to the real essence or essence as realized, and so much the more from the *esse formale* of the essence taken in itself as content of being. Thomas, although progressing through the years in

Ens, therefore, let us note in the fourth place, has a strong meaning, rather the strongest possible meaning, in Thomistic semantics, which remains constant on this point: "*Hoc autem nomen ens significat ipsum esse. . . .* Hoc nomen ens quod significat ipsum esse."[26] It is for this reason wholly outside of Thomism, even diametrically opposed to it, to describe *ens* as "that which has *ordinem ad esse*," that is, as essence "*cum ordine*" *ad esse*, where the meaning of *ens* is no longer *being* but essence, no longer act but content and potency, which meaning St. Thomas excludes expressly when in our text he says, "non ab eo cui convenit actus essendi."[27] Assuredly in *ens* are included *essentia* and *esse*, content and act, and essence expresses *esse* as formality (*humanitas Petri*), but the *esse* that is signified in the participial form of *ens* is *esse* as the act of every form and essence: it is from this beginning that Thomistic metaphysics takes its character in its fundamental genetic nucleus as pure speculation concerning the act of *esse* or the transcendental *actus essendi*.

Just as *loquens* is the one who speaks and *ambulans* the one who walks, so, and primarily, the participle *ens* signifies the act of being: "primarily," because *esse* is what makes every act to be in act. What is surprising and what must engage our attention in this Thomistic grounding of metaphysics is its absolute newness that makes it distant from all the static schemata of classical thought and the extrinsecism of scholasticism (Arabic and Christian). Moreover, after the failure of modern philosophy of immanence that has dissolved being into the becoming of the act of consciousness by scattering it into the meaninglessness of happening and thus taking from philosophy its essential task of the determination of the truth, the perspective of *ens* according to Thomas truly constitutes that *Anfang* of absolute grounding that Hegel sought after in vain and that Heidegger points out as the sole path of salvation for thought.

a deepening of the transcendentality of *esse* as act, grasped the need for it from the start. On the meaning of the text of Boethius, cf. our *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, 3 rd. ed. (Turin, 1963), p. 98 ff.

[26] *In IV Meta.*, l. 2, nn. 556, 558. And later in the same fashion: "Nam ens dicitur quasi habens esse" (*In XII* Meta., l. 1, n. 2419).

[27] And earlier still with unequivocal vehemence: "*Ens autem non dicit quidditatem, sed solum actum essendi, cum sit principium ipsum*" (*In I Sent.*, d.8, q. 4, a. 2; Mandonnet I, 225). And again a little later: "*Nomen entis ab esse imponitur*" (*In I Sent.* d. 19, q. 5, a. 1; Mandonnet I, 486). The cue for this emergence, at once semantic and metaphysical, of *esse* comes first of all from the Neo-Platonism of the *De Causis*, from Boethius and from Pseudo-Denis, who show their influence in the texts of capital importance: *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3 contra; *De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1, sed contra 4.

Transcendentality of Being: Founding the Philosophical Act

The guiding text that we have chosen for this grounding of metaphysics continues in its *pars construens* by articulating first the dialectic of negation (*unum, multa*) and then the dialectic of relation (*ordo unius ad alterum*) that is truly the foundation or transcendental relation, possessing a function or meaning quite different from the one that came into use in the Thomistic schools of the baroque epoch and over which some Thomists of our own day still dally. What interests us particularly, however, at present is a basic investigation of the *pars fundans* that modern thought has brought to the discussion. St. Thomas certainly could not have foreseen the methodological demands of modern philosophy, but it is necessary to recall that modern criticism has lumped St. Thomas together with formalistic scholasticism. On the other side, the "return to being" proclaimed first, in his own way, by Hegel and then by Heidegger, has brought back to the fore the insistence on being as the ground. On the theme of being St. Thomas has laid down some important indications that can still trace out the initial guidelines of the fundamental Odyssey of thought. Let us proceed to elaborate this in a schematic manner.

1) First comes the absolute priority of *ens* over the transcendentals and over any notion whatsoever as the original semantic and metaphysical nucleus: "quasi notissimum." The dialectic of the transcendentals is thus in function of *ens*: "Unum, verum et bonum secundum proprias intentiones, fundantur supra intentionem entis et ideo possunt habere oppositionem contrarietatis vel privationis fundatae super ens, sicut et ipsa super ens fundantur."[28] We have treated of it in the preceding pages, but its importance is equal to its evident character and demands a treatment in depth so that we may retrace in the opposite direction the entire path of the *Wissenschaft der Logik* of Hegel in the valid parts of its problematic.

2) Next comes the pure transcendentality of *ens* as "constitutive containment" of every knowing act in its manifold reflexive and spontaneous forms and, first of all, in the two fundamental branches of the life of the spirit that are consciousness (*verum*)[29] and virtue

[28] *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 ad ultimum; Mandonnet I, 490.

[29] "Cum autem in re sit quidditas eius et suum esse, veritas fundatur in esse rei magis quam in quidditate, sicut et nomen entis ab esse imponitur.... Unde dico, quod ipsum esse rei est causa veritatis secundum quod est in cognitione intellectus" (*In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1; cf. ad 7).

(*bonum*). The true and the good express what can be called the "dynamism of intentional expansion" of *ens* in the process of realizing the task or the path of the spirit hinted at in the preceding number.

3) Next there is the essential (and mutual) interconnectedness of *ens* with consciousness and of consciousness with *ens*, as a corollary to the two preceding points: "Ens non potest intelligi sine vero, quia ens non potest intelligi sine hoc quod correspondeat vel adaequetur intellectui." No circularity results, however, and the grounding priority of *ens* is, therefore, always preserved: "Sed non tamen oportet quod quicumque intelligit ens intelligat rationem veri, sicut nec quicumque intelligit ens intelligit intellectum agentem, et tamen sine intellectu agente nihil intelligi potest."[30] It was Greek and Christian Neo-Platonism, as absolute realism (which is absolute idealism at the same time) that affirmed the direct and adequate correspondence between the intentional and real order; in the "dialectical realism" (it is a provisional term) of St. Thomas the correspondence between the mode of being and the mode of knowing, between being and truth, is only proportional, but always positive in virtue of the *primum apprehensum*, which is precisely what *ens* is.[31]

Here is truly the nucleus of a metaphysics of the foundation according to the authentic transcendental method.

4) From this point one can proceed to speak of a "transcendental efficacy" of *ens* as an activating ground of the whole intentional order: "quasi notissimum et in quod omnes conceptiones resolvit" (*De Ver.*, q. I, a. 1); ". . . *sine quo* nihil potest apprehendi ab intellectu" (*In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1. a. 3); ". . . nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, *nisi* intelligatur ens" (*In IV Meta.*, 1. 6, n. 605); ". . . *unde unicuique apprehenso a nobis attribuimus quod sit ens*" (I-II, q. 55, a. 4 ad 1); ". . . cuius intellectus *includitur* in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit" (I-II, q. 94 a. 2). Here there is a question of an efficacy of irradiation and of convergence of the whole spiritual sphere both of knowing (*verum*) and acting (*bonum*), which has for its task the actuation of the process from the implicit to the explicit (hinted at above), with a view to the projection of an authentic Thomistic metaphysics.

[30] *De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1 ad 3.

[31] Here is an expression of rare efficacy for serving as a replica of Hegel: "Numquam potest intelligi intelligibile secundum hanc rationem nisi intelligatur ens. Unde etiam patet quod ens est prima conceptio intellectus" (*In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 ad 2; Mandonnet I, 488).

5) Just as in the movement of irradiation *ens* becomes explicitated, that is, expands into the most disparate forms of knowledge in their principles and by means of them into the various methods and conclusions that are proper to the different sciences and kinds of knowledge, so, too, in the movement of convergence, that is, of constitutive reflection on the foundation, the spirit, which is openness to all by its nature, carries back the manifold principles to the first principles, in order to resolve at last the first principles themselves into the primordial presence of *ens*. This is the Hegelian requirement for essential, constitutive, reflexive immediacy—expressed in the dense formula of Heidegger, "the presence of the present" (*Anwesenheit des Anwesenden*)—which Hegel entrusted to the "leap" (*Sprung*) of the dialectic and Heidegger abandons to the alogical-pragmatic sphere of the temporal historicity of being. It is St. Thomas himself who speaks of *ens* as the ground of the first principles, which he traces back to the principle of contradiction which in turn he founded on *ens*: "Primum principium indemonstrabile est quod non est simul affirmare et negare, *quod fundatur super rationem entis et non entis et super hoc principio omnia alia fundantur*" (I, q. 94, a. 2).[32]

It is at this level, therefore, following the lessons of modern thought, that we find satisfied in an unexpected way a theoretical demand of profound affinity with Thomism, one which poses and decides the fate of thought, that is, of its ground and value. The theoretical demand is that one must take the "essential step" of thought, that is, bring it back to the "constitutive beginning" by means of the apprehension of *ens*. The incomparable force of *ens* is that of being the *synolon* or resolutive plexus of the double dialectic of thought as relationship of consciousness to being and as relationship of essence to act of being. This double dialectic, indicated by Hegel and amplified by Heidegger, can be satisfied only within the *ens* of Thomism, provided it be taken in its authentic speculative force.

The comparison of the *ens* of St. Thomas with Hegel and with Heidegger opens the perspective, it seems to us, of a radical grounding for metaphysics through the essential interconnectedness of being and consciousness, or of what has been called the "reduction to the ground." It is possible to trace the fundamental steps of

[32] The most complete text is *In IV Meta.*, 1. 6, n. 605, as will shortly be explained.

such a process for a recovery of the logos that will no longer lead to disappointment.

Only this logos, which becomes the *locus proprius* and the substance of the eternal and constitutive metaphysics, can save man from throwing himself into technology and semantics and put him within hearing of the truth of being: we are not speaking now of concepts directly or of concept in the ordinary and explicative sense as notions proper to things in their genus and species, but of the original λόγος in which the mind is born of itself into being, so that it is found implicated in being itself and authenticated in truth by means of its presence. What for three long centuries modern thought has been seeking in vain, that is, the ground of truth through the reduplication of consciousness in itself with the pure *cogito*, only *ens* can achieve, provided it be understood as what grasps and contains, or rather, the nucleus illuminating and containing the whole, that is, the infinite space of consciousness. This mission cannot be accomplished with the *ens-essentia* of Avicenna and scholasticism, nor with the *cogito-volo* of modern philosophy, but solely with the *ens, quod significat actum essendi*, of St. Thomas. Its speculative vigor was to be misunderstood in the centuries of Christian civilization dominated by the unquestioning admission of the createdness of the finite and was to remain more or less in obscurity in the Thomistic school itself for an analogous reason, namely, because of the lack of a demand for the radical ground. But after the rise of modern transcendentality it stands out by contrast in the whole dialectic. Let us limit ourselves to a few basic hints of what ought to be the problematic for the perspective of a metaphysics with being as its ground.

1. *The apprehension of ens as original infinite openness of the mind* (against Kant). When St. Thomas affirms that *ens* is the absolutely *primum cognitum*, he intends to express a principle: it is not a question, that is, only, even principally, of a *primum psychologicum*, but of a constitutive priority in every direction of intentionality and throughout the entire sphere of consciousness. Not only the supposed fidelity to Aristotle, who dissolves *ens* into the categories and the principles of the categories (matter-form, act-potency), is here surpassed, but even Avicenna, who gave the first clue, is abandoned because of his reflecting back to *res* and its modes as presented in his own position (*possibile esse, necesse esse*), in order that Thomas may insist on *ens* as the bearer of *esse* and raise it to an "absolute positing." It is not a question here of dependence on essence or on form as in the actuality of the content

of the act, but of elevating the act in *esse* itself, which transcends, therefore, every content and form, in order to establish it as the "universal container" so that the function of "active transcendentality" that modern philosophy wished to attribute to the pure *cogito*—a *cogito* that is empty, as well, because it reduces itself to nothingness—is effectively dissolved.

The demand of Kant, then, that fundamental knowing is synthetic, is correct, since knowing is at the same time presence and interior increase: as presence it follows upon absence and the emptiness that is ignorance; and as interior increase it nourishes the life of the spirit that advances in the world in order to realize the possibilities of that life. The a priori synthesis of Kant remains, however, an extrinisc function on all its levels, whether of sense intuition (space, time), or of the understanding (categories) or of reason (Ideas), because the two principles of the synthesis, precisely because they are designated as matter and form, stand and must remain outside of and impenetrable to each other, and it is the role of the act of consciousness to join them (one does not know how). The synthesis of *essentia* and *esse* in the Thomistic *ens*, on the contrary, is the nexus of act to act, both because, first of all, essence is act as content and *esse* is act as containing, and also because the being-in-act of consciousness as presence in act is founded on *ens*, or the being-in-act of *ens*, and is present in virtue of the presentation (in act) of the real; it is thus a self-giving that is an intrinsic and constitutive corresponding. It is formalistic scholasticism that has put the moderns, from Descartes to Kant, to Hegel, finally to Heidegger and Sartre, off the track.

2. *The original synthesis of essentia-esse in ens as transcendental synthetic act of the spirit* (against Hegel). When St. Thomas, therefore, affirms that *ens* is the *punctum resolutionis* of knowing in all its fullness, he, and not Hegel, adequately fulfills the demand of the "beginning." The reason is that, while Hegel's (and Heidegger's) *Sein* reveals itself as nothingness because of its immanentistic positing, and in the end is only a pseudo-immediate, a provisional immediate of *Verstand*, the *ens* of St. Thomas is the authentic transcendental immediate, or rather, the immediate that is already virtually the means which by itself, through its own power, proceeds to mediation. All well and good, then, the criticism of Kant as far as the abstract transcendentals of scholasticism are concerned. But this does not touch transcendental *ens*. For the latter expresses to the maximum degree of universality the extreme form of concreteness: *ens*, in fact, means *id quod habet esse*, and so when there

is *esse*, all is given in its ultimate concreteness of reality because it is placed in existence. In this fashion is satisfied in a fundamental way the twofold demand of Parmenides that "without being there is not thought" and at the same time "that being and thought are one."[33] St. Thomas posits, first, that the transcendentals and every other concept refer back to *ens* and presuppose it, while, secondly, he affirms that the apprehension of *ens* is the fundamental noetic principle. That is why, in this highest sphere of reflection, we can say that the Kantian *synolum* or plexus of matter and form as fundament of the synthetic a priori judgment—justly criticized by Heidegger and rejected by him as an empirical extrapolation—is also opposed by St. Thomas in the name of the truly transcendental *synolum* and plexus of essence and *esse* presented by *ens*:

> Cum autem in re sit quidditas eius et suum esse, veritas fundatur in esse rei magis quam in quidditate, sicut et nomen entis ab esse imponitur: et in ipsa operatione intellectus accipientis esse rei, sicut est per quamdam similationem ad ipsum, completur relatio adaequationis, in qua consistit ratio veritatis. Unde dico quod ipsum esse rei est causa veritatis secundum quod est in cognitione intellectus.[34]

What is this "operatio intellectus accipientis esse rei, sicut est per quamdam similationem ad ipsum" in which "completur ratio adaequationis," except the nucleus of that synthetic transcendental function which constitutes always and everywhere the grasping of reality by consciousness, or rather its entanglement in the real that constitutes it in act. The error of Hegel, and subsequently of Heidegger, is in having posited as a beginning a pure *Sein*, that is, an empty act, and an emptiness such that it must vanish into nothingness. Thus they have posited a pseudo-beginning and, therefore, no beginning at all, and have made everything vanish into simple happening. The error of Kant is in having left being aside as *Position* and in having, therefore, attributed binding force or a priori synthesis to a later moment like judgment. But prior to and without the apprehension of *ens* no judgment, real or logical, metaphysical or moral, can have meaning because it is without *ens*, and, without reference to the real, judgment can in no way take place.

3. *The original presence of ens as fundamental actuation of the spirit* (against Heidegger). The being of Heidegger as "presence of the present" (*Anwesenheit des Anwesenden*) corresponds to the

[33] Fr. 9, 34-36 (Riezler), which corresponds in Diels to Fr. 8.
[34] *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a 1.; Mandonnet I, 486.

Hegelian *Sein* of the "first immediacy"; it is the *reines Sein* that stands in itself (that is, as simple and univocal consciousness), without dialectic because it has been received as simple presence of consciousness, as pure *cogito*, and is therefore stripped radically of every reference to the Absolute that Hegel the theologian had (mistakenly) injected as "content" into his own *Sein*.

With good reason has Heidegger held responsible for the forgetfulness of being the scholastic distinction of *essentia et existentia* (or *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*), which dominates Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, and he is right in vindicating the immediacy and constitutive priority of act. But an act that is not intrinsically united with content can be no act at all, because it is the presence of nothing. And act cannot, in modern thought, be intrinsically united with content because owing to the principle of immanence, immediate sense experience—even in empiricism—is condemned in advance as non-truth and left outside of truth; and the content of knowing—even in empiricism—is taken from the act itself (the principle of clearness of ideas in rationalism, of association in empiricism, and of a priori transcendental synthesis in idealism). And so nothing can be begun or finished, but everything is exhausted in the pure "standing and looking" (*das reine Zusehen*) of Hegel.[35]

Quite the opposite is true of the apprehension of *ens* in Thomism and the simultaneous attestation of the being-in-act of the real, and of the being-in-act of consciousness, and of the being-in-act of the mutual relationship of the real to consciousness and of consciousness to the real as *constitutive of consciousness*. It is in this synthetic intensive actuating that first of all the transcendentality of *esse* in *ens* as ground consists, insofar as *ens* says precisely *id quod habet esse*—"says," that is, makes present what has being, what is act of being, as that which is in act of being. Note well: here, by means of the *esse* of *ens*, it is *ens* that makes itself present to consciousness and it is consciousness that is actuated as the presence of *ens*. It is true that it is *ens* that makes *itself* present, and for this reason Parmenides said that without being there is no thought; but it is just as true that it is by consciousness' own receptivity that the being of *ens* announces itself in act for con-

[35] Fichte as well, at the time of the *Atheismusstreit*: "Unsere Philosophie macht umgekehrt das Leben, das System der Gefühle und des Begehrens zum Höchsten und lässt der Erkenntnis überall nur das Zusehen" (*Rückerinnerungen, Antworten, Fragen*, 1799; Medicus III, 216).

sciousness and this is the core of what Parmenides expressed when he affirmed that "being and thought are one."[36]
This is the case because thought, like love, is supreme life in act and the thinking of being is the original step of the spirit. To begin, then, with *ens* in this, its transcendental tension of act and content, is to recognize the constitutive interconnectedness of content (essence) to act (*esse*) and this is at the same time the removal of the pretended radical doubt of modern thought, that is a blind alley and has brought philosophy to naught. *Ens*, on the contrary, has the drive or tension for the unlimited development of thought within the great ocean of being, in accordance with the inexhaustible tension of essence in relation to an *esse* that is incommensurable with essence because it is the act of every act. Thus, it follows that to the modern principle of the interrelatedness of phenomenon to consciousness by means of the act of consciousness, which must lead to the renunciation of the truth and to a radical historicity, there must be opposed the Thomistic principle of *ens* or interrelatedness of *essentia* and *esse* as what actuates the whole life of the spirit: "Primo autem in conceptione intellectus cadit ens, quia secundum hoc unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu."[37] "Unde ens est proprium obiectum intellectus et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonum est primum audibile."[38] It is from these texts, and from other similar ones cited above, that one must overturn the positions taken by Kant in the first *Kritik*, by Hegel in the *Wissenschaft*, and by Heidegger in *Was ist Metaphysik?*, in order to rediscover that ground of consciousness in being which these same thinkers sought in vain, because being remained in *umbra conscientiae* instead of becoming the act and the light.

4. In a certain sense, however, in the Thomistic conception, it might be said that *ens* insofar as it is the ground of the transcendentals is the transcendental of transcendentals, or simply, the *transcendentalizing one*, and this is valid, above all, for the constitutive transcen-

[36] Fr. 4 Riezler; 5 Diels. The legitimate sense of the fragment seems to us that clarified by Riezler (*Parmenides*, Frankfurt a. M. 1933, p. 63 ff.), which correctly recalls the verses of Fr. 9, 34 ff., and concludes against the minimizing and anachronism of immanentistic interpretations: "Das, um dessentwillen der Gedanke ist, ist ebenso das *νοεῖν* wie das *εἶναι*.; es ist ausgesprochen in einem *ὄν*, ohne das ein *νοεῖν* nicht anzutreffen ist, dieses *νοεῖν* ist auf keine Weise ein anderes ausserhalb dieses *ὄν*; das Sein ist immer Sein des Erkennens, das Erkennen des Seins. Daher sind beide zusammen eines und dasselbe" (*op. cit.*, p. 70).

[37] Cf. *Meta.* IX, 8, 1051a 31.

[38] *I*, q. 5, a. 2.

dentals of the life of the mind, which are *verum* and *bonum* as "expansions" of *ens*. In this respect modern thought has been particularly challenging. The priority of *ens* over the other transcendentals is thus not a piece of speculative bravura or scholastic abstraction, but the starting point for the recognition of the concreteness of act which stands at basis of consciousness itself. For *verum*, as we have already seen, it remains incontestable that "*. . . ratio veritatis fundatur in esse.*"[39]

> Et hoc modo ens [esse: Mandonnet] potest intelligi sine vero; sed non e converso: quia verum non est in ratione entis, sed ens in ratione veri; sicut potest aliquis intelligere ens, et tamen non intelligit aliquid de ratione intelligibilitatis; sed numquam potest intelligi intelligibile, secundum hanc rationem, nisi intelligatur ens.[40]

So much the more is this true for the existential perfections that concern the life of the spirit more directly, and therefore for *bonum* as such: "*Vita et sapientia et alia huiusmodi sic appetuntur ut sunt in actu; unde in omnibus appetitur quoddam esse; et sic nihil est appetibile nisi ens, et per consequens nihil est bonum nisi ens.*"[41]

In all this doctrine, which constitutes the authentic nerve of Thomistic metaphysics, what interests us at this time, first of all,

[39] *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 ad 7; Mandonnet I, 489.

[40] *Ibid.*, ad 2 (Mandonnet I, 488); cf. *De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1 ad 3. When one reads such texts from a young bachelor of theology, he cannot but regret that they are completely ignored by modern philosophers: yet the fault is not theirs, but rather of the scholastics who first condemned them to oblivion by substituting in their place the vacuities of a "metaphysics of the possibles" or essences.

[41] *I*, q. 5, a. 2 ad 4. The doctrine is again, also on this point, of a Neo-Platonic origin: "Quod autem per se esse sit primum et dignius quam per se vita et per se sapientia dupliciter ostendit [Dionysius]: *primo* quidem per hoc quod quaecumque participant aliis participationibus primo participant ipso esse: prius enim intelligitur aliquod ens quam unum, vivens vel sapiens. *Secundo*, quod ipsum esse comparatur ad vitam et alia huiusmodi sicut participatum ad participans: nam ipsa vita est ens quoddam et sic esse prius et simplicius est quam vita et alia huisumodi et comparatur ad ea ut actus eorum" (*In Lib. Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*, c. 5, 1. 1; ed. Pera n. 635: cf. n. 639). Other decisive souces for this Thomistic doctrine are the *De Causis* (Prop. IV: *Prima rerum creatarum est esse*; ed. Bardenhewer, p. 166, 19) and the *De Hebdomadibus* of Boethius (cf. *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, 3 ed. 1963, p. 100 ff.; *Partecipazione e causalità*, 1960, p. 187 ff.). Hence, for the reason that they are founded on purely abstract formalities and abstracted from *esse*, that is, because they do not have *esse* and are not *entia*, mathematical realities ". . . non sunt bona" (*I*, q. 5, a. 3 ad 4.).

is to take the first essential step with respect to being, in order to answer and satisfy the legitimate demands of modern thought when it stipulates that the speculative act must be constituted by itself without any reference beyond that is not the deepening of the act in itself, as the clarification of its own originating possibility. Such possibility can be indicated only in the first and immediate apprehension of *ens*, and never in the pure *cogito*.

In this "resolution to the ground" one must always insist on act and on the requirement of an act that stands in itself and does not wane, and this is only *esse*, unlike essence, which sinks into the predicaments and belongs to the noetic sphere of the possible. We have thus an ascending of act to act by perfective degrees from the predicamental to the transcendental. In the predicamental order there is the emerging of substantial and accidental *esse*: "Nam cum ens dicat aliquid proprie esse in actu, actus autem proprie ordinem habet ad potentiam; secundum hoc simpliciter aliquid dicitur ens, secundum quod primo discernitur ab eo quod est in potentia tantum. Hoc autem est esse substantiale rei uniuscuiusque; unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ens simpliciter. Per actus autem superadditos dicitur aliquid esse secundum quid...."[42] In the ontological metaphysical order there is the emergence of the pure perfections, such as life, wisdom and, in general, the activity of the spirit, over the material perfections, inasmuch as the former by their belonging to the sphere of the spirit participate more fully in *esse*: "Si ista [per se vita, per se sapientia[quae sunt principia aliorum, non sunt nisi per participationem essendi, multo magis ea quae participant, non sunt nisi per participationem ipsius esse."[43] The properly transcendental order, about which we have been speaking up to now, follows. It comprehends two moments or degrees: first, the emergence of *ens* over the other transcendentals as their principle and ground, owing to *esse*, which is the act of every act and the perfection of every perfection, as we have said. What is operative in this reduction to the ground is always the principle of act:

> Substantia, quantitas et qualitas, et ea quae sub eis continentur, contrahunt ens, applicando ens ad aliquam quidditatem seu naturam. Sic autem bonum non addit aliquid super ens, sed rationem tantum appetibilis et perfectionis, quod convenit ipsi esse in quacumque natura sit. Unde bonum non contrahit ens.[44]

[42] *I*, q. 5, a. 1 ad. 1.
[43] *In Dion. De div. nom.*, ed. cit., *l.c.*, n. 639.

In this powerful reduction to act, it is always *ens*, insofar as it contains and asserts *esse*, that effectuates the transcending of act to act in the transcendental order. It does this in two ways: first of all, as the ground for the derivation of the transcendentals themselves (*unum*, *verum bonum*), and then as terminus of the return of their dialectic—a terminus which is the ineffable and inexhaustible point of the actuation of the real and of the infinite expansion of the life of the spirit. It is from within this fundamental perspective that one can sketch the lines of a "metaphysics of act," which, taking from modern philosophy the requirement of radicality or absolute emergence of the theoretical act, traces it back to the apprehension of *ens* as the all-embracing act of the presentation of the real to the mind and of mind to itself. And the conclusion presented here shall suffice for our explanation of this direction.

Radicality of Philosophical Procedure concerning Being

There still remain, if we are to clarify the character of this "prologue" to the metaphysics of the ground, some profound observations which St. Thomas—as far as this author can discover—has only lightly touched upon, and which, owing to the cultural situation of his time, he could not have been aware of with the urgency that they impose on us after the tempest of modern thought. These are certain lacunae or open themes of historical Thomism which it is necessary to try to resolve in some manner, so as not to succumb to the double temptation, either of absolute indifference towards modern thought and the imprisonment in a static and abstract Thomism uprooted from the life of the mind, or of an affirmation of a generic and unspecified Thomism with its danger of a facile concordism (with Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger).

A first clarification concerns the origin of the notion of *ens*: everyone realizes at once the importance of the problem. But it is just as necessary to recognize that the texts of St. Thomas are quite sparing of indications. If St. Thomas, as we have seen, is from beginning to end firm in the position that *ens* is the *primum* in every intentional sphere, he says, on the other hand, almost nothing on *how* the human mind grasps such a notion. In a famous youthful text, when he still thought of the origin of the first principles in a way slightly influenced by Augustinian illuminationism, he attributes the origin of the *notio entis* to the abstractive process of the agent intellect:

[44] *I*, q. 5, a. 3 ad 1.

> Praeexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina, scilicet primae conceptiones intellectus, *guae statim lumine intellectus agentis cognoscuntur per species a sensibilibus abstractas, sive sint complexa sicut dignitates, sive incomplexa sicut ratio entis et unius* et huiusmodi, quae statim intellectus apprehendit. Ex istis autem principiis universalibus omnia principia sequuntur sicut ex quibusdam rationibus seminalibus.[45]

In the same context the *notio entis* is placed at the summit of all notions and at the beginning of the mind's path:

> Illa de quibus per signa docemur, cognoscimus quidem quantum ad aliquid, et quantum ad aliquid ignoramus; utpote si docemur quid est homo, oportet quod de eo praesciamus aliquid, scilicet rationem animalis, vel substantiae aut saltem ipsius entis quae nobis ignota esse non potest.[46]

But *how* this *ratio entis* arises in the mind is not mentioned and one does not see how. The preceding text attributes it expressly to the abstractive process, but these indications, if they can be satisfying for an Aristotelian gnoseology such as flows into the *notio entis* of, for example, a Suarezian-Scotistic type, do not suffice in the context of an authentic Thomism. The Thomistic *notio entis* has two fundamental characteristics: first of all, that of being the noetic ground of the first principles and so of preceding them; and, then, that of embracing two elements, which are both and antithetical yet of ultimate affinity and interrelatedness, namely *essentia*, or content, and *esse*, or *actus essendi*. But if abstraction presupposes this and is founded on the knowledge (and activity) of the first principles, as St. Thomas affirms, then the original apprehension of the *notio entis*, which precedes everything and is presupposed in everything, cannot be merely the effect of abstraction in the ordinary sense.

Similarly if the *notio entis* includes—and this is its characteristic trait—both essence and *actus essendi*, and not in any fashion whatsoever, but in such a way that *nomen entis ab esse imponitur*, the origin of the *notio entis* can in no wise be referred to the process which abstracts only essence. Aristotle had recognized that being is not a genus, but only because of its extremely indeterminate content which finds its proper determination in the categories. For St. Thomas, if we understand him correctly, *ens* escapes every logical classification because, thanks to *esse*, it indicates the exercise in

[45] *De Ver.*, g. 11, a. 1.
[46] *Ibid.*, ad 3.

act of reality, that is, being in act, which is for the mind the starting point and constitutes the fundamental act of its operation. Furthermore, having recourse to any form of innatism or even to a special form of intuition is a gratuitous step and makes one suspect a clearly formalistic or essentialistic position. Insofar as the *notio entis* properly includes *esse* as its distinguishing characteristic, it rivets and connects consciousness of necessity to reality in act, from which, for this reason, the mind cannot abstract.

Nevertheless, it seems possible to say—especially after the immanentizing, or better, the reducing of *ens* to nothingness by Hegel and Heidegger—that just as the *notio entis* is a synthesis of content and act, so also it is a certain ineffable form of "conjoint apprehension" of content on the part of mind and of act on the part of experience[47]: not, be it noted well, on the part of any sort of experience, that is, not the mere fact of existence, but the experience of the simultaneous awareness of the being-in-act of the world in relation to consciousness and of the actuation of consciousness in its turning to the world. We have no intention here of making any allusion to the profound speculation of Fichte on the *Ego* and even less to the confused divagations of the Rosminian "Being," but only of recalling that problem to raise it to a prior and more theoretical moment.

The second clarification—which should form a continuation of the previous one—concerns the *locus intentionalis* of *esse* or the *actus essendi*, that is, the phase or function of the mind that grasps reality insofar as it is in act. Such an absolutley primary function, when it is a question of *ens*, stands poles apart from abstraction and cannot be an object of abstracting reflection properly so-called, but only of direct and immediate apprehension. One interpretation, quite widespread among Neo-Thomists, tries to resolve the question with a good deal of elegance: just as in simple apprehension essence is grasped, so too in the judgment *esse* is grasped.[48] They maintain

[47] Concerning sense experience St. Thomas uses the negative expression: "Quamvis esse sit in rebus sensibilibus, tamen rationem essendi vel intentionem entis sensus non apprehendit, sicut nec aliquam formam substantialem, nisi per accidens, sed tantum accidentia sensibilia" (*In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 ad 6; Mandonnet I, 489). We also attribute, in fact, the *notio essendi* and the *notio entis* first of all to intellectual consciousness with a reference to experience in *actu secundo*, that is, to the Thomistic *conversio ad phantasmata* which is understood by means of a total reflection (cf. C. Fabro, *Percezione e pensiero*, 2 ed., Brescia, 1960, pp. 383 ff., 585 ff.).

[48] "Actualité et originalité de l'*esse* thomiste," *Revue Thomiste*, 56 (1956), 485 ff. See also: *Participazione e causalità*, Italian ed., pp. 41 ff.

that the texts of Thomas are explicit on this meaning: "Cum in re duo sint quidditas rei et esse eius, his duobus respondet duplex operatio intellectus. Una quae dicitur a philosophis formatio, qua apprehendit quidditates rerum. . . . Alia autem comprehendit esse rei componendo affirmationes."[49] But let it be said for the peace of all of us: these and other similar texts do not treat at all of our precise question: they deal with the characteristic function of the two operations of the mind which divide the two-fold content of the notion of *ens*, essence and *actus essendi*. Therefore, the *notio entis* precedes them both, just as, in fact, *ens* precedes *res* and *verum* in the grounding of the transcendentals. The wishes of not a few authors, therefore, to make St. Thomas into a Kantian are to be set aside completely and can find some justification among those who—like Kant, Hegel and Heidegger—stop at existence as a fact and a positing of reality, but not among those who are willing to probe into the profundity of Thomistic speculation concerning act.

Conclusion

A radical grounding of Thomistic metaphysics must, therefore, have its center or intentional focus no longer, as up to now a certain tradition of Aristotelian predominance has accustomed us to think, in a treatise on substance and the categories, but on one concerning the transcendentals, in which would be proclaimed and explained for the first time the total engagement of consciousness in being and which would give expression to their mutual and essential interrelatedness, not according to the "transcendentality" of modern philosophy but by an opposite movement. It would, in fact, make quite clear, as opposed to the dogmatic identification that modern thought makes between truth and necessity (preconception of knowledge as science), that not every immediate knowledge is (or can be) uncertain, false, and thus to be put aside "in order to pass beyond" (*über-weitergehen*: Hegel). Rather there is an initial constitutive immediacy which precedes all knowledge, whether pragmatico-utilitarian, centering on the needs of a life that is subject to uncertainties and continuous errors in its judgments and yet totally indispensable, or the scientific knowledge that is born of calculations and experimentation and is equally subject to error and deviations but which continues to progress by overcoming just such inadequacies. It is a question, that is, of that original apprehension of the real expressed by the *intentio entis* that is con-

[49] *In I Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 3; Mandonnet I, 903; cf. *ibid.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 ad 7; *In Boeth. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3; Decker 182, 5.

stitutive of consciousness in act and constitutes the inexhaustible tension of its unlimited path.

Someone, perhaps, after these observations that await further development, might observe that they give too much credit to the demands of modern thought and, thus, of course, raise suspicions that in terms of them we are thinking of changing Thomism into something hitherto unknown and different from what it has been up to now. Rather, let us observe, they aim at breaking through the dead end in which philosophy stands in its sterile opposition of realism and immanentism, and at discovering precisely in the most profound and authentic Thomistic notion of participation that theory of transcendentality whose function of ground for the insertion of consciousness into the real modern thought has seen more clearly than scholasticism, though only the original Thomistic conception can adequately fulfill this function. By following exactly the requirements and lines of the reflections of Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, which have been so revealing concerning being, Thomism can become trimmed of its dross and intensified around that point of infinite concentration and inexhaustible expansion that is *ens*, understood as the tension of *quod est* (*essentia*) and *esse* (*actus essendi*). For it is this which constitutes the dynamic center of the path of the mind towards the ground and the very meaning itself of truth.

Translated by Ch. McKay, S.S.